July X, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi and Minority Leader McCarthy:

We are writing on behalf of the Children's Budget Coalition to urge you to support the House-passed funding level of $8.45 billion for the U. S. Census Bureau in Fiscal Year 2020 (FY 20), including $7.5 billion to conduct a fair, equitable decennial census that is successful in all communities and accurately counts our nation's young children. At the same, we ask that this funding receives "off-budget" status so critical funding for the constitutionally-required decennial census is not pitted against other essential programs serving children, not only within the Commerce, Justice and Science (CJS) Appropriations Bill, but also within other annual spending bills funding these important programs and services benefitting our nation's children.

The Children's Budget Coalition is made up of more than 80 children's advocacy organizations with priorities across a diverse range of issues, from child welfare and nutrition to housing and education. Together, we advocate for children to be a priority in federal budget and appropriations decisions so that we are properly investing in our nation's future. Underfunding the decennial census directly threatens this goal, increasing the risk of an inaccurate count of the nation's children—which would deny them appropriate representation in Congress and jeopardize fair funding for the federal programs in which they participate.

The decennial census already consistently undercounts children, missing more than two million young children in 2010. Children under five are especially likely to missed if they live in complex or multi-family homes, live with grandparents, are poor, move frequently, are children of color, or linguistically isolated. Failure to count these and all other children successfully will rob them of the support they need to become healthy, productive American adults. Census data guide the allocation of more than $800 billion in federal funding to programs that provide a broad range of crucial services to help keep our most vulnerable children and families from falling into poverty. Those programs include CHIP, Medicaid, Child Care and Development Fund, Foster Care, Head Start, Special Education Grants (IDEA), the National School Lunch Program, and WIC. Accurate data is especially critical for allocating federal funds to our children because we know that robust investment in early childhood development results in improved school performance, better health, higher earning potential, and increased opportunities for parents to participate in the workforce.

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As you finalize a budget caps deal, it is imperative that you equip the Census Bureau to manage the growing number of challenges associated with delivering a fair and equitable census, such as an increase in the diversity of our populations, the complexity of living arrangements, the mobility of people in the United States, and a steady decline in self-response rates across all surveys. The allocation of robust funding for the decennial census must not come at the expense of funding for other Non-Defense Discretionary programs serving children across the government. The CJS appropriations bill alone is an important resource for children, funding a wide range of programs aimed at keeping children safe, improving the juvenile justice system, fighting domestic violence, fostering child education through science, providing advocates for children in the welfare system, funding effective mentoring programs, and more. A budget caps deal should provide adequate funding to protect and preserve the quality of the census and build off the success of the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 to support healthy funding for programs that improve the lives and well-being of nation's children. To accomplish these objectives, we strongly urge you to designate FY 20 Census Bureau funding outside of the NDD Budget Caps.

Without these critical steps occurring by October 1st, 2019, the 2020 census certainly will fall far short of the comprehensive, accurate count that is foundational to our democracy and paramount for our children and economic future. We urge you to prioritize our children and adequately fund the decennial census at this pivotal time with $7.5 billion of cap-exempt funding.

Signed,
First Focus Campaign for Children

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